The Way Switchboard Work is
Handled in Illinois.

By

Carl C. Wiley.

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The Switchboard Operating is taught at the Illinois School for the Blind by the Placement Agent whose duties are, to instruct students in Switchboard work; to check all Institutions; to try to get positions, in any field, for the Blind; to start the new employee in the work; and to try to adjust any trouble that may arise.

In checking the Institution, he finds out how many sightless stenographers and industrial instructors, and music employees the Institution can successfully employ; and how many Operators sightless and sighted that they do employ. In his travels, he is on the look-out for Switchboards in hotels, department stores and public buildings.

In getting positions in Institutions, the Placement Agent deals directly with the Managing Offcer and the Department of Public Welfare. The Department of Public Welfare has backed the blind and since 1929 has encouraged the Managing Officers to employ the blind so that they could prove thier efficiency.

The boards that are in, and owned by the Institutions, and other boards that are owned by private concerns are equipped with the Watson Touch Pilot Equipment; but where they are owned and rented to the establishment by the Telephone Company, the equipment is manfactured by the American Telephone and Telegraph Organization and is used. This last mentioned equipment can be used and is acceptable by any Company, it resembles the Watson Touch Pilot Equipment in the surface and the principale of indicating the signals.

The Placement Agent or School should have a miniature Switchboard to demonstrate with, because it helps to convince the prospective employer that the sightless Operator can be efficient. The miniature Switchtboard and the Watson Touch Pilot Equipment can be purchased from the Switchboard Department at a reasonable price. In ordering an Equipment state the number of lines, number of sets of plugs, the make of the board, if privately owned, if not, what company owns it, and the number of trunk lines.

In the Switchboard classroom we have a switchboard and an equipment for the students to practice on.

The general information is as important as the handling of the plugs; therefore the Instructor should have had experience as well as the training.

Information has been gathered from the different Institutions and private concerns. The student must familiarize himself with this information. The Agent having had experience, lectures on the work because it is like any subject, impossible to put everything on paper. He impresses on the Operator the duty of service and courtesy. The blind must be careful and do everything in their power to convince the sighted that they are one of them. The Agent lectures on being independent but yet polite, and not to be sensitive about blindness.

The accuracy and speed which the Operator must attain gives excellent hand training. The Operator must learn to take approximately five-hundred calls per hour.

The responsibility of holding a position, especially in Institutions, is stressed; because the Operator has from 2,000 to 5,000 insane patients and from 300 to 500 employees whose life might at any time be in the hands of the Operator. Each attendant has from one to one-hundred patients in his care, and a delay or error on the part of the Operator, in case of an emergency, might cause several deaths.

Personai appearance and attitude to the public is also discussed and stressed. We must bear in mind that we are trying to give the public one-hundred per cent Operator, and to do that, we cannot confine it to just "plug slinging", because personal appearance social contact, attitude to the public and employees make up a hundred per cent. Operator.

The Operator must do some clerical work, therefore he must be a rapid braille writer, and be able to type, because the notations must be taken down in braille and transcribed to the type writer. The taking and delivering of telegrams, filing, making out reports and reciepts are handled in this way.

This course requires from ten to twelve weeks, At the end of the course, the student is required to be able to take approximately 500 calls an hour, to write a theme on the work, to answer 100 questions which completely cover the work. If these demands cannot be met satisfactorily the student does not receive his certificate or recommendation.

Personally, I feel that it would be advantageous to the States to employ an experienced Operator for their Placement work

and Instructor. It would save a lot of pioneer work. It would be almost impossible for a person to learn the work in a few months and carry it back to a strange land. As I have stated, an Instructor should be an experienced Operator, and one who can set an example, would have more force in the employing field.

This work should be handled by the schools, and Agencies and backed by the Department of Public Welfare, because it gives more force and is more impressive to the concerns that are being contacted. If the State will take the step first and employ the blind other employers will take it as an example and follow.

I shall be at the convention at St. Louis in June and hope to have the book which we are compiling on this course ready for circulation with me. I shall be glad to explain any of the work and answer questions. If any of you are interested, and desire more information, I shall be glad to answer questions by mail. We believe that this is a splendid field for the blind, and are very anxious to make it United States wide, or even international. With the modern equipment, the only difference between the blind and sighted Operator's work is that the sighted Operator, when he gets the signal, glances at the board and starts his connection; while the sightless Operator lays his hand on the equipment and locates the number of the station which is calling before he begins his connection.

Now let all of us get behind the work and help the blind to become self-supporting, and consquently happier; instead of dependent and unhappy.

In conclusion, I want again to assure you that I am willing to furnish any information or aid that I can to any of you.

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